

Week 3



This week was different as some schools were closed on Thursday and Friday and as I had to go to Malaysia to renew my VISA I had to re-arrange my workdays slightly. On the Island of Penang outside the east coast of Malaysia they have a Thai consulate which seems to be the most popular option for so-called VISA runs whereby Thai tourists leave Thailand for a day or two to renew their VISAs. Everything went smoothly and I got a 60 day VISA covering the rest of my time here in Thailand. Once back in my bungalow in the jungle I realised someone had visited me. From the tracks on the ground just outside my door I would say a 4-5 cm thick snake had crossed the path. Snakes are of course part of the game if you live in the jungle but it is still a bit creepy especially at night time as it is pitch black here. From now on the door is closed at night.

Elephant trekking

One of hundreds of things to do while in Thailand is Elephant trekking so for a couple of hours between two of my classes we decided to have a go. Elephants are big creatures and apparently they never forget you so first impression is essential, you won't get a second chance.

We arrived at the trekking place and were introduced to a 32 year old beauty called Sandy. Sandy was huge and a very nice elephant. She took us on a little walk among big stones, rocks and a through a little river. To me the route looked dangerous and almost impossible to walk especially for a huge elephant with slippery feet but believe it or not, Sandy did not agree with me and moved up the track like an experienced rock climber. She wasn't even close to making a mistake and we felt surprisingly safe in our little sofa up top. The way down was even worse but Sandy took us down safe and sound and was treated with a bucket of bananas when we reached the finish line. I didn't know elephants actually peel the bananas before they eat them, now I know. Sandy, what a top girl!



The building project

This week the construction of the school came into a new phase. We started to put concrete on the walls in order to make them even and ready to be painted. For me this meant mainly assisting in carrying buckets of concrete and water to the more experienced guys.

I'm impressed at how fast they can get a wall to change from rough stone structure to a 100% smooth and polished surface. I hope I get the chance to carry out some of these tasks as well during next week, at least to put the first layer of concrete on the walls. The crew consists of between seven and nine people of which four are women and they all have their roles within the crew and it all seems to work very well. This week they told me I look like someone called David Beckham....(poor David), first I thought they told me to go back home (it's not a joke), but that was obviously not the case. I then tried to explain that I actually do look very much like my twin brother which didn't help the conversation at all. Suddenly they thought I was Beckham's brother..... I can't wait until I get the hang of this language as there are too many misunderstandings at the moment ☺.

The students in Pakklong are following the work on the school with interest and after the initial confusion that I, a teacher, suddenly started to work on the building site as well they suddenly started to provide with me water, fruit, yoghurt and ice cream to make sure I eat and drink properly. They are so nice and generous and it makes you feel welcome and a bit special and I'm not but they are, of course, very special.



Wednesday 11th of February ~ Banmuang school

As all schools were closed on Thursday this week some of my classes were cancelled but luckily I managed to have my second Guitar class at the Bangmuang school on Wednesday. We left the children's songs from last week behind and started to play Knockin' on Heavens door, practiced strumming techniques, tuning and had a go at a new scale. They are doing a great job and even if they think Dylan might be a bit old and boring they managed to get it to sound ok. Some of the guys who don't own a guitar were given the option to borrow one guitar each over the weekend and the excitement these two guys showed was priceless. It doesn't take much to make some people happy.

Friday 13th of February ~ Pakklong School

Today I brought a guitar for the first time to the Pakklong school. The idea was to sing some English songs and then try the same songs on the flutes. I didn't realise that songs such as Happy Birthday and Jingle Bells would go down so well! Another good thing is that both these songs can be played within one octave on the Irish Flutes, BINGO!! To get the right swing of the words in the songs we read the text out slowly and loud first a few times and I did my best in explaining the words in Jingle Bells by skipping around the classroom like a horse, with bells under my chin and some less artistic attempts to draw a sleigh on snow on the blackboard. Then we sang the songs together a few times. It actually worked and Jingle Bells sung with a Thai accent in the middle of the summer can actually sound quite ok.

With ten more flutes compared to last week we now had 23 flutes practicing at the same time and yes, this time it sounded better than last time if a little noisy. Some are progressing really quickly while others still struggle. It would of course be perfect if I could have a 15 min lesson per week with each kid but with almost 200 kids in my classes this isn't possible.

Like every Friday afternoon, we finished off the day with some football. I was in great shape and scored three goals. What a great feeling! Bit embarrassing though when I realised that my team somehow at some point had changed side so I actually managed to score my last goal in our own goal. NOT VERY IMPRESSIVE!! It is very confusing for me when all the players have the same school uniforms and I don't know them well enough yet to remember each name so my homework for this weekend is of course student names. I have all students saved in my computer with a name tag in English so I have no reason not to learn them.

As the working week at Pakklong School was nearly over I decided to put my reputation in the Pakklong village on the line by lending some of the flutes to the students over the weekend. Maybe not the wisest move ever considering the village is tiny and if someone plays a flute somewhere everyone can hear it. The students were extremely happy though and with a flute in one hand and a piece of sheet music in the other they wandered happily off in different directions constantly singing or playing Jingle Bells over and over again. Before the last two girls were about to leave they came up to me and gave me a pink rose each as a Valentine gift and one of them said, "I love teacher Ola". What can I say..... very touching and what a great way to finish off a working week in the jungle!

Stay tuned for next week's edition
Ola